

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



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Testimony Neither for nor Against LD 626 to the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

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Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and distinguished members of the Committee:

My name is Peter Lehman and I live in Thomaston. I am a formerly incarcerated citizen and a person in long-term recovery.* I am testifying on LD 626 on behalf of the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition whose goal is to promote restorative practices in order to increase public safety and the health of our community.

The bill reflects current practice. This bill is designed to give the DOC “explicit” permission to do what it is already doing.

It’s important that educational release and remote work become explicitly permitted and encouraged.

BUT it is neither proper nor justified to charge a resident for their prison cell or their prison food. AND, it is counter to the rehabilitative process to withhold earnings that could be used to support successful reentry.

The Department of Corrections argues that this is “normalization”—treating residents more like they were in the outside world. But they are NOT. There is no CHOICE about the room and no CHOICE about the board.

This is another example of the MDOC taking a rehabilitative program and turning it into a profit center.

But, **please** don’t waste this opportunity. We ask that you **amend LD 626** to strike all of Section E, lines 28-35, pertaining to room and board, from the proposed bill. The remaining bill would recognize education release, remote work and public service work and other programs resulting in the payment of restitution without authorizing payment of room and board.

Thank you for your attention.

I welcome questions and feedback.

* In the interest of honesty and disclosure, a personal background statement is available on request.